

That Strange Byers Kid by misstinamarie

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Summary:

After his encounter with the Upside Down, Will tries to heal from his experience as well as come to terms with the things that make him "different" In Hawkins, Indiana. Potential trigger warnings for homophobic language.

That Strange Byers Kid

Will could never be normal. He wasn't after the Demogorgon, but he was never "normal" by Hawkins' standards. His mom and dad divorced before he could even remember, his brother barely talked to anyone besides Mike's sister or Steve Harrington, and he was "the boy who came back to life". Whether it was other neighborhood moms whispering about how "unconventional" Joyce was, or bullies mocking Jonathan's appearance, or other fathers speculating about why Lonnie left Joyce alone with two young boys who seemed frightened of their own shadows, they all had something to say. But no one had ever had anything bad to say about Will, they complimented how smart he was, how polite he was, but they all had a sad look in their eyes when they talked about "the younger Byers boy".

He had only been in the Upside Down for a few days, but it felt like months, if not years. The darkness still haunted him every time he closed his eyes, and he wretched black sludge every time he ate, but somehow, he was still grateful to be alive. He'd always been small for his age, but his mom and Jonathan were worried that his growth was stunted. He would stop talking for a few days, but eventually he saw how sad it made Joyce so he would sing The Clash or The Police to make her smile.

At school, none of the teachers gave him points off for not speaking up, they knew he was still recovering. After Hopper and his mom found him, Will had been in the hospital for weeks, all of his tests coming back extremely irregular, but after a few days of sleep he seemed just fine. He still went to a child psychologist once a week after school. Most of the adults in the area were under the impression that some creep had kidnapped him, but he ran away and almost froze to death. His psychologist thought "the monster" was a code word, but pretended like it was literal. Will never bothered to explain that the monster wasn't just his imagination, the people who mattered understood it was real.

He tried to hang out with Mike, Lucas, and Dustin more, but some days he was just too tired, and when they did hang out, Mike

especially had the tendency to treat him like he was made of glass. Sometimes Mike would talk about a girl and then quickly stop, but when Mike first described her, something seemed too familiar.

“When you were gone, this girl showed up in the woods behind my house, she had a shaved head and she only responded to Eleven and didn’t really know how to talk.” Mike started, obviously tense.

“She could move stuff with her mind! And she broke Troy’s arm!” Dustin exclaimed.

“Yeah, she was alright, but at first she was kind of creepy.” Lucas added.

“Her dad works for Hawkins Labs, and used her for experiments.” Mike concluded.

Will nodded in understanding. After a minute of silence, he said “I think I saw her.”

Mike was flabbergasted. “Do you think she’s still alive?” He almost yelled, but quickly turned down his volume.

“I mean, when I was, *there*” Will indicated the D&D board that was flipped upside down “There was a girl around our age who would sit next to me sometimes and make sure I was okay. She never said anything, but I think she scared off the monster.”

Everyone quickly went silent again. This was the most Will had talked about the Upside Down since he came back, and the other boys weren’t sure if they were ready.

“Nancy’s home; I could ask her to drive us to the arcade” Mike broke the tension. All four of them smiled and started joking around again while Mike ran upstairs.

“NANCY” He wailed. His parents weren’t home, and Nancy was supposed to be watching them but she was upstairs with Steve Harrington.

“What, Michael? Can’t you tell we want to be alone?” Nancy opened her door and yelled back.

“Can you give us a ride to the arcade” Mike asked calmly

Steve stood in the doorway, and grabbed Nancy’s waist. “Sure, we would love to as a matter of fact. Just give us a few minutes.”

“And don’t forget to grab your jackets!” Nancy lectured.

Mike gave an exaggerated sigh, but as he went downstairs he gave a thumbs up sign to the boys.

“Ah yeah!” “Nice” Dustin and Lucas gave each other high fives as the ran up the stairs. Will was obviously a little bit winded still, and was slow to catch up to the others. They all piled in the back of Steve’s Camaro.

Steve ruffled Mike’s hair. “Alright little dudes, Nancy and I are gonna get some food while you guys play. Do you have enough quarters?”

The boys all nodded in response.

“Nice. We’ll be back in an hour, so stay together.” Even Steve had a slight edge in his voice, he wasn’t sure what could happen in this town anymore.

Dustin and Lucas both headed in line to play Tempest, while Mike and Will opted for Galaga. They switched every few minutes, but they didn’t really talk much other than shouting about who was going to get the highest score. After an hour or so, Steve and Nancy came back and took them back to The Wheeler’s house.

Dustin and Lucas both headed for their houses, while Will waited for Jonathan.

“Will, I’m sorry for bringing up Eleven.” Mike shifted his weight between his legs.

“You don’t have anything to be sorry about. I’m sorry she’s gone.” Will kept his head down.

“So am I” Mike agreed.

Jonathan knocked on the door, and Mike yelled for him to come

inside. Jonathan ruffled his younger brother's hair and put his arm around his shoulder.

"Tell Nancy I said 'Hi'" Jonathan said to Mike over his shoulder, as he and Will went to his car.

In the car, Jonathan told Will that their dad called and asked about him.

"What did he say?" Will asked, slightly untrusting.

"He just asked how you were doing, and if you wanted to go bowling or play catch with him some time." Jonathan noticed Will's expression change. "Look, you never have to be around him if you don't want to, I know he's not the easiest, but he's still our dad. Doesn't act like it much, but he has to be around sometimes."

Lonnie was never a "good" guy. He had gotten Joyce pregnant when Jonathan was young, and sometimes Jonathan wondered if it was on purpose. He was a washed up former high school baseball player who worked in the Quarry since he was 20. Joyce didn't like to admit it, but they both drank a lot when they were young. The difference between the two was that when they were expecting Jonathan, Joyce quit but Lonnie didn't. They fought, a lot, and most of the time Jonathan was caught in the middle. When he got old enough to protect his mom, Lonnie backed off physically, but would hurt her in other ways. Lonnie quit drinking for a little while shortly before Will was born, but they divorced when he was 3. Even then Jonathan took care of his brother, making sure his diaper was changed, he had enough food, and all the books and toys he needed. Their mom worked at the local grocery store, but would take up odd jobs around Christmas to buy the boys a little bit more. They still often relied on the good will of neighbors and friends, but it made Joyce feel better to know she was giving her boys a chance.

"Jonathan?" Will started to ask sheepishly.

"What's up bud?" Jonathan started to pull into their driveway.

"Will I ever be normal?"

Jonathan was taken aback by the question. Out of the entire Byers clan, Will was the most normal, but he knew Will wasn't talking about their parents being together, or them not having as much money.

"I don't know, bud. I don't think any of us are" He said, slowly with a slight sadness.

"I Just- I mean, I don't" Will sighed and tried to gather his thoughts. "I don't like the same things other boys like, and I don't think girls are cute"

Jonathan was a little bit relieved, but he knew Will still got teased at school. The bullies liked to call him "homo" and "fag" and "gay", and he saw how hard that was on Will. Even Lonnie, when Joyce wasn't around and he and Jonathan went shooting would jokingly call Will "queer".

"There's nothing wrong with that, bud. You're just a little bit more ahead of the times than everyone else around here is." He hugged his brother close, and when they separated he looked Will straight in the eye "You have always been the strongest kid I know, you understand that?"

Will nodded.

"And someday, you're going to be the smartest man in the country. Don't ever forget that"

Tears started to form in Will's eyes. He remembered at the hospital when Hopper called him "a tough kid". No one had ever called him tough before. But hearing Jonathan, his brother who would do anything for him, say it too, made him feel like he could conquer anything.